

August 12, 2008

Dear Parents,

How is it that the middle of August always seems to creep up on us, and then suddenly the summer slips away as quickly as it came? While this letter may only serve to reinforce that feeling of summer's end, it is just meant to give you some important information for the next few weeks, and after reading it I hope that you will go directly back to enjoying what is left of these sunny summer days!

Here at the Middle School we have had a very busy few months. People are often surprised to learn that we are open and busy all summer long, but you would be amazed to know of all the activity that takes place here. Dr. O'Neil runs Shady Side's very successful Summer School here in our building, and there are a variety of day camps and sports camps that make this their home as well. Add to that the multitude of maintenance projects that we have and you can just imagine that we are hopping for much of the summer here.

When your children arrive in the last week of August they will find a number of improvements here at the Middle School. Thanks to the Middle School Parents' Association, the classrooms on the second floor of the old part of the building have had air conditioning installed, and I know that everyone, faculty and students, will appreciate that monumental change. Many thanks to the leadership of that group, as well as to everyone who participated in the Gala, the funds from which helped to make it possible. This year we will have four more classrooms equipped with SmartBoards, to bring us up to a total of ten. We have also installed a very cool looking new climbing wall in the gym that is ready for action. Finally, the sixth grade wing has had a total facelift, with fresh paint and new carpeting, and will look just terrific when the children come in the door. Sadly, we lost the tree in the circle of the driveway over the summer, and once that stump is removed we will be replacing it with a new one. Until then it is awfully blank looking, but we will be attending to that very soon.

While all of those changes to the building are enormously helpful, it is the people inside of it that are most important, and we have three new members of the community to introduce to you. Christine Heiler comes to us most recently from the Sheridan School in Washington, DC, and before that from the Chicago Latin School. Mrs. Heiler will be a sixth grade advisor and will be teaching sixth grade English. Lucy Turner will move to Form I and Form II English, and will be a Form I advisor. Also teaching Form I English, as well as Form II Latin and sixth grade Study of Language will be Lorraine Kiger. Ms. Kiger comes to us with a degree in Classics from Yale. She is a native of Pittsburgh and an Ellis alumna, so she is well versed in the life of an independent school. Finally we will have a new part time library assistant, Paige Cochenour. Ms. Cochenour comes to us also via Ellis, by way of Ohio University, and will be working with Mrs. Ashworth four days a week. We are thrilled to have these very talented women with us this year, and I know that you will join me in welcoming them to our community.

While all of our returning families are now familiar with the routines here at the Middle School, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce the many families who are new to us to our process of disseminating information to you on a regular basis. At the beginning of each month I will send a letter like this one to you outlining important happenings to come here at the Middle School as well as to share information about what has been going on in recent weeks that you may or may not be aware of. I try to highlight events that you will want to add to your calendars, and call your attention to things that are coming up. Enclosed in this first letter you will find the Middle School calendar for the year, which I hope will find its way onto your bulletin board or refrigerator so that you can refer to it often. Also there is a cycle rotation schedule, so that you and your child can keep track of which day in the cycle it is. This monthly letter will come to you in the mail, but it will also be posted on the website at [www.shadysideacademy.org](http://www.shadysideacademy.org).

The Academy website is a very valuable source of information for all things Shady Side – upcoming school-wide events, photos, up-to-the-minute athletic information, as well as teacher pages with every Middle School teacher’s assignments and testing information posted. Once school begins each teacher will have his or her weekly assignments posted on his or her teacher page, so this is an excellent resource for students as well as parents. The assignments can change from what is posted on any given day, given what happens in class, but as a rule they are pretty accurate, especially for test, quiz, and project dates. Also on the website is a supply list for each grade. The school calendar is updated regularly on the website, so it will have the most accurate calendar information available. Please do refer to our calendar for all of the Academy’s critical dates and plan accordingly. We have a very generous vacation schedule, so I ask that you please plan family trips with these dates in mind.

Everything we do here at Shady Side hinges upon our understanding of the Academy Guiding Principles of Respect, Honesty, Responsibility, Kindness and Safety. These principles are what guide our relationships with each other, and therefore create the learning atmosphere that is critical to our success with the children. They are also the underpinnings of everything that is included in the enclosed Parent/Student Handbook. Your child will receive a copy of this on the first day of school, but prior to that we think that it is important for you to read through the Handbook with your child in order for everyone to have the same understandings of the rules and expectations, and how they fit into our Guiding Principles. It can also answer many questions for families ahead of time, so please do take some time out to go over it. I call to your attention in particular the school code of ethics, the dress code, and the attendance procedures. The “S” Book, which is an Academy-wide school directory, will be published and distributed in September in order to be as current as possible.

When your children arrive here at the end of the month we will have a host of orientation activities for them. Prior to that we will have an **orientation session for the parents of new students (including ALL sixth grade parents) in the cafeteria at 6pm on Wednesday, August 20<sup>th</sup>**. This is mainly a question and answer session, and is entirely optional. It can be a helpful time to hear about Middle School routines and expectations, however, as well as to meet other parents. When the children come on Orientation Day for all sixth graders and all new Form I and Form II students, they will be greeted by a number of returning students, and then they will be sorted into their homerooms for a day of learning about the building, who their teachers are, and where to put their things. We will also spend a lot of time on working combination locks! The following day, Thursday, is Opening Day for everyone, and we will begin the day with a welcoming assembly, and then have the homeroom sort for all of the Form I and Form II students. We have **Picture Day** on the first day of school as well (everyone is usually here, and looking great!), and the forms for that are enclosed in this mailing. If in the excitement of the first

day your child should forget the form please do not worry, as everyone will have a picture taken, and then we can sort out the paperwork afterwards. Also please get the enclosed permission slips to us as soon as possible, because field trips for some grades start right away!

Transportation is often a concern at the beginning of the year, so please check with your district's bus company before school starts if you have any questions. It is also very helpful if your child knows his or her *bus number* at dismissal time, so that we can get him or her to the right spot. Remember that dismissal is *always* from the Senior School, and that if everyone follows the faculty's directions we can have it moving pretty smoothly in no time. The same is true for arrival. Please pull up to the far yellow line in the mornings to dismiss children from a car, and **never** pull around cars that are still discharging passengers for obvious safety reasons. Discharge passengers from between the two yellow lines only, and always pull as far forward as you can before doing so. When we all work together on these things they go quite well.

Our goal here at the Middle School is to communicate with you clearly and regularly so that the partnership we have between school and home is as seamless as possible. We ultimately serve the children best when we work together, which is everyone's goal. The Middle School years are marked by incredible intellectual, physical and emotional growth, and the children seem to change daily. You will get regular feedback from your child's teachers and his or her advisor, but if you have questions please be sure to ask them, either by phone or by email. The information that you get from your child is usually quite interesting but it can often be only a piece of what you need, so you might want to learn more from the teacher. We all look forward to the new children who come through the doors in August, because they are all new in some ways, whether they were here last year or not. The gift of a fresh start in the fall is one that we all relish and look forward to with great anticipation.

There are still a number of days of summer vacation left, and I hope that you and your children will enjoy them to the fullest, whether they involve swimming, reading, hammock-sitting or just lazing around with friends. I look forward to seeing you all when we return in a few weeks, but until then squeeze every minute out of the rest of the summer!

Sincerely,

Amy Nixon Mindlin  
Head of Middle School